Lexus Eco Challenge Urges Students to Improve the Environment

August 30, 2011

TORRANCE, Calif., August 30, 2011 – Over the past four years, the Lexus Eco Challenge, an educational program and contest, has inspired and empowered more than 20,000 middle and high school students to learn about the environment and take action to improve it. For their efforts, more than $3 million has been awarded to students, teachers and schools across the nation. This fall, students are invited to participate in the fifth annual Lexus Eco Challenge for a chance to win part of $500,000 in grants and scholarships. Lexus, the luxury automaker, has once again joined with Scholastic Inc., the global children's publishing, education and media company, to create the eco-friendly educational school program.

"The Lexus Eco Challenge has helped change the way I teach," said Debbie Viertel, a teacher from Lawton Chiles Middle School in Lakeland, Fla. "By giving my students a real-world challenge, they come up with something they care about. Then they learn all the things I want them to learn in math and science, but the difference is that now they care. It's a wonderful program."

Last year's grand-prize-winning middle and high school teams demonstrated how passionate students and great ideas can inspire an entire community and improve the environment globally. Educating the community about the contamination of lobsters in local and global waters and raising money to purchase solar panels for their school and encouraging others to look into renewable energy were the two top winning projects.

"Last year the students and teachers went above and beyond the scope of the Lexus Eco Challenge," said Mark Templin, Lexus group vice president and general manager. "We're eager to see what the fifth year will bring us. Every year, we see the students and their teachers being more resourceful and committed to their projects. It's wonderful to see how the Lexus Eco Challenge is making an impact on their schools, community and our environment."

The Challenge has two distinct elements:

- Standards-based supplementary educational materials – encourages teachers to integrate creative lesson plans into their classrooms to help teach students about the environment.
- Competition to reward environmental action – helps young people apply what they've learned in class through the program and empowers them to make improvements in their community by participating in the environmental team challenges.

The Challenges and Rewards

The Lexus Eco Challenge registration opens on Sept. 26, 2011, and will conclude with the announcement of the first-place and grand-prize-winning teams in Spring 2012. Middle and high school teams, comprised of 5-10 students and a teacher advisor, are invited to participate in one or both of the two initial challenges, each addressing different environmental elements – land/water and air/climate.

For each of the challenges, teams define an environmental issue that is important to them, develop an action plan to address the issue, implement the plan, and report the results. Submission deadlines are: Challenge #1 (Land/Water) – Oct. 31, 2011 and Challenge #2 (Air/Climate) – Dec. 19, 2011.

Each of the challenges will have 16 winning teams – eight middle school and eight high school teams. The winning teams will each receive a total of $10,000 in scholarships and grants to be shared among the students, teacher and school. In addition, the winning action plans will be featured on a special Web page to inspire other students to take action in their communities.

In early January, the winning teams from the first two challenges will be invited to participate in the Final Challenge. Teams will be asked to reach beyond the local community and inspire environmental action around the world through innovative ideas that are communicated to a wide audience. From the Final Challenge entries, eight first-place teams and two grand-prize-winning teams will be selected. Each of the eight first-place teams will receive a total of $15,000 in grants and scholarships, and the two grand-prize-winning teams will each receive $30,000. The money will be shared by the students, their teacher advisors and their schools.

Judging Criteria

All entries for the initial two challenges will be judged on a variety of criteria, including the overall action plan and team effort, the quality of writing, and supporting materials. A select panel of judges will consider questions such as: does the action plan show the team's clear understanding of the environmental issue; does the action plan clearly describe the results; does the action plan communicate a persuasive argument; and does the action plan communicate team effort?

Full program information including official rules and entry details can be viewed at www.scholastic.com/lexus.

Teaching Tools for the Classroom

The Lexus Eco Challenge educational materials developed with Scholastic are designed to align with national teaching standards for science, social studies, civics and language arts.

In addition to providing teachers with the information necessary to participate in the challenges, the website (www.scholastic.com/lexus) also has extensive tools for them to use in their classrooms. For each challenge, the website has lesson plans and teacher instructions including questions to help guide a discussion about the current challenge topic, facts about the topic, and guidelines for a specific classroom project.

Lexus' Environmental Efforts

Lexus was the first luxury brand to sell hybrids and currently offers five low-emission hybrid vehicles. When Lexus began selling hybrids in 2005, it helped advance the concept of sustainability without sacrifice. To bring like-minded individuals together, it also developed the Lexus Hybrid Living site (www.lexus.com/hybridliving) that serves as a portal for people seeking a way to incorporate luxury and environmentalism into their lives.

The Lexus Eco Challenge is part of The Lexus Pursuit of Potential, a philanthropic initiative that generates up to $5 million in donations each year for organizations that help build, shape and improve children's lives.

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